

Are Homeschooled Children Doomed to be Social Misfits?

by Kelly Stripling

A misconception about home-educated children is that they have an insurmountable deficit when it comes to socialization. After all, they stay home all the time. Being social is, by definition, "having to do with human beings living together as a group in a situation in which their dealings with one another affect common welfare" (www.yourdictionary.com). If you've considered homeschooling but are concerned about this challenge, let me provide some examples that show me my kids are just fine when it comes to affecting the common welfare of human beings.

My mother reports that just about every time she takes my three boys out in public someone stops her to comment favorably about their behavior. People have stopped my husband and me in the grocery store to ask how we keep our children under control while we're busy shopping. When we enter or exit a store, ladies stop in amazement when one of our young men runs back to the door to make sure he gets to hold it open for her. One woman actually informed us that we were making wimps out of our boys because they try to help ladies with doors, but we ignored her! Our children know how to behave well enough that it makes a positive impression. At this point, I feel it necessary to admit that my children also know how to misbehave, but thankfully, most of that happens at home!

My children can go into any store, library, or other public place and voice their questions to the appropriate adult there to get what they need. Regardless of the age, gender, appearance, or skin color of that adult, they can communicate their need and respond reasonably well to the adult's questions and follow their instructions. As a family, we've been to museums, farms, camping expos, and department stores to study Waterford china. The boys are able to adapt to different levels of formality and engage in conversations with professionals in all of these areas. It is not our goal for our children to be able to get along with a room full of children their same age. We want them to be able to get along in the world.

A few months ago, our boys befriended a little guy at the park named Jack, who had Down Syndrome. We watched them play and entertain the preschooler for several minutes, and then we spoke to Jack's babysitter. It turns out that Jack is also deaf and mute, and in all the times the sitter had brought Jack to that same playground, no other children had ever played with him or even acknowledged his presence. She was thrilled, and Jack was all smiles. Our boys have interacted with children of all ages, from babies to teenagers, with success, and they do not feel uncomfortable or unable to positively affect the welfare of any of these groups. They play with girls and boys of varying ages, engaging in sports and other games and just plain kid stuff that really has no category, and they do well. Their command of English is good enough that they adjust their language to suit the hearer.

One of their greatest lessons in learning to get along with others is staying home, contributing to the welfare of this thing we call "family." They must continually play together, share, help, and avoid sibling squabbles. Some of life's greatest lessons come from living out what God wants us to do right under our own roof; for while it is often easy to behave as we should in public, the times when we are "just ourselves" can reveal behaviors that take much more work to overcome.

We realize there are additional social skills our boys could learn from a public or private school, but most of those skills will not eventually contribute to humanity's common good or the good of our children. As we think about how to socialize our children, our question must be what kind of society are we raising them to be?